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Up the Rhine

Hood, Thomas

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To Gerard Brooke, Esq.

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a toilin and moilin at mens labers in the roads and fields. But thats not the wust, theyre made beasts of. Wat do you think, Becky, of a grate hulkin feller, a lolluping and smoking in his boat on the Rind, with his pore Wife a pullyhawling him along by a rope, like a towin horse on the banks of the Tems!

TO GERARD BROOKE, ESQ.

MY DEAR GERARD,—After the postscript of my last letter, you will not be surprised to hear, that a longer stay at Bonn was strongly objected to by my Uncle, who, having “not many days to live,” sets a peculiar value on his nights. Like myself, he had been annoyed by the nocturnal rattling and singing,—and indeed he declared in the morning that he would as lief reside “next door to Vauxhall.”

The arrival of the first steam-boat was therefore the signal for our departure; and bidding adieu to Bonn with an emphatic “*Peace be with you,*” we embarked in the Prince William. It had brought a tolerable assortment of tourists from Cologne, and amongst the rest our old acquaintance the Red-faced man. For some reason he fought particularly shy of my Unele,—but with myself he was as communicative and complaining as usual. He gave me to understand that he

had been prodigiously disgusted by the high Catholic mummeries at Cologne, and still more annoyed by the companionship of the "Yellow-faced Yankee," who of course, to plague him, had taken up his quarters at the same hotel. "Renounce me," said he, "if I could get rid of him—for as we two were the only persons that spoke English in the house, he *would* converse with me, whether I answered or not. Consume his yellow body! he stuck to me like a mustard plaster, and kept drawing my feelings into blisters;—however, I've got a good start of him, for he talked of staying a whole week at Cologne." But alas! for the pleasant anticipations of Mr. John Bowker! He had barely uttered them, when the turmeric-coloured American appeared running at full speed towards the steam-boat, followed by a leash of porters! "Say I told you so!" exclaimed the petrified citizen—"he'll haunt me up to Schaffhausen,—he will by all that's detestable—yes, there he comes on board"—and even as he spoke, the abhorred personage sprang into the vessel, followed by his three attendants. The Red-face could not smother a grunt of dissatisfaction at the sight,—but what was his horror, when, after a few words with the conducteur, his old enemy walked straight up to him, and puffed a whiff of tobacco smoke into his very face! "It's an unpleasant sort of a fix," said he, "and in course only a mistake, but you've walked off with all my traps and notions instead of your own." "I've what?" gobbled the Red-face, its crimson instantly becoming shot with blue.

"You've got my luggage, I guess," replied the Yellow-face, "and if it's all the same to you I'll just take it ashore." The perplexed Bowker was too much agitated to speak; but hurrying off to the huge pile of bags and boxes, in front of the funnel, began eagerly hunting for his baggage. To his unutterable dismay he could not recognise a single article as his own. In the mean time the American appeared to enjoy the confusion, and in a dry way began to "poke his fun" at the unfortunate traveller. "Mister Broker, is that 'ere your leather trunk?" "No," growled the other. "In that case it's mine, I reckon." "Mr. Broker, is that 'ere your carpet-bag?"—and in the same provoking style he went through nine or ten packages *seriatim*. "And where—where—where the devil is my luggage then?" asked the bewildered Bowker. "The last time I see it," said the Yellow-face, "it was in the passage of the Mainzer Hof; and there it is still, I calculate, provided it hasn't been shipped downwards to Rotterdam." "To Rotterdam!" shouted the Red-face, literally dancing with excitement: "Gracious powers! what shall I do?" and then hastily turning round to appeal to the nearest bystander, who happened to be my Aunt, "Renounce me, madam, if I have even got a clean shirt!" "It's all right," said the American, as the porters shouldered the last of his properties;—"it's an ugly job, that's the truth; but it might have been a considerable deal worse, and so I wish you a regular pleasant voyage up the rest of the Rhine."

“Say I told you so!” repeated the discomfited Bowker, after a long hyena-like grin at the receding object of his aversion—“it was all as true as gospel—he *is* my evil genius and nothing else!—If it hadn’t been for his yellow face—(here you Sir, in the green apron—a glass of brandy and water—hot, and sweet, and strong!) if it hadn’t been for his infernal yellow face, I say, I should have looked after my luggage! But he’s my evil genius, Sir—I know it: renounce me if I don’t believe he’s the Devil himself! Why else don’t his jaundice kill him—I should like to know that—why don’t it kill him, as it would any one else?” Luckily his eloquence was here interrupted by the hot brandy and water; and the conducteur undertaking to forward the missing baggage to Coblenz, the crimson face gradually grew paler, whilst his temper cooled down in proportion, from the red heat of Cayenne pepper to that of the common sort.

The bell now rang, forewarning the passengers and their friends that it was time to separate; whereupon, to the infinite surprise of my Aunt, two remarkably corpulent old gentlemen tumbled into each other’s arms, and exchanged such salutes as are only current in England amongst females, or between parties of opposite sexes. To our notions there is something repulsive in this kissing amongst men; but when two weather-beaten veterans, “bearded like the pard,” or like Blucher, indulge in these labial courtesies, there is also something ludicrous in the picture. It is, however, a

national propensity, like the bowing; and to the same gentleman who told me the anecdote of Herr Klopp, I am indebted for a similar illustration.

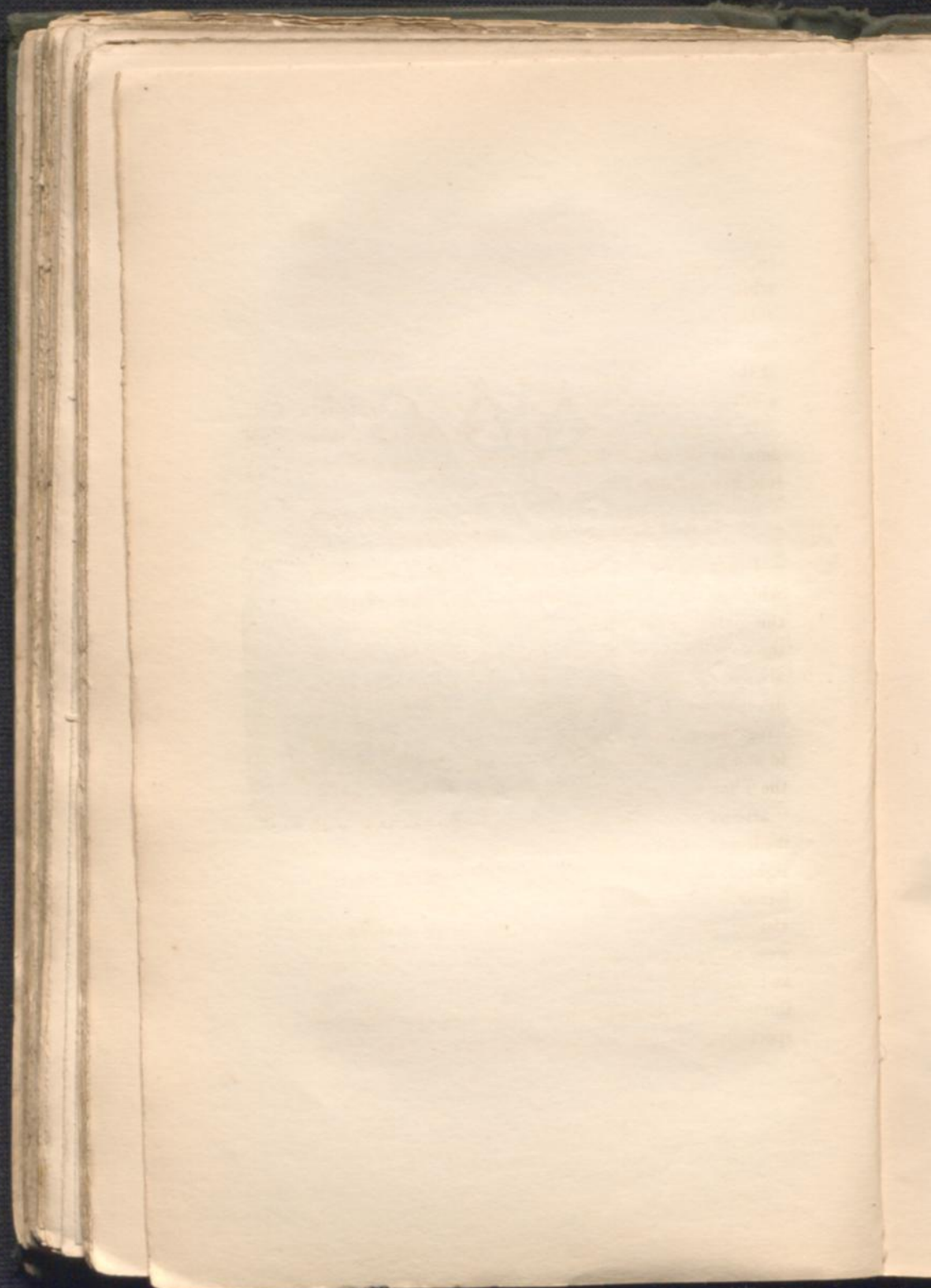
“On the last New Year's Eve,” said he, “being at Coblenz, I took it into my head to go to an occasional grand ball that was given at the civil Casino. The price of the tickets was very moderate; and the company was far more numerous than select. Indeed a Frenchman of the time of the republic might have supposed that it was a fête given in honour of the famous principle of Egalité,—there was such a commixture of all ranks. At one step I encountered the master tailor who had supplied the coat on my back; at another, I confronted the haberdasher of whom I had purchased my gloves and my stock;—the next moment I was brushed by a German baron,—and then I exchanged bows with his Excellency the Commander of the Rhenish Provinces. There was, however, a sort of West-end to the room, where the fashionables and the Vons seemed instinctively to congregate; whilst the bulk of the Bourgeoisie clustered more towards the door. Dancing began early, and by help of relays of performers, one incessant whirl of gown-skirts and coat-tails was kept up until midnight, when, exactly at twelve o'clock, the advent of another year was announced by the report of some little cannons in an adjoining room. The waltz immediately broke up, and in an instant the whole crowd was in motion, males and females, running to and fro, here and there, in and out, like a swarm of

ants, when you invade their nest. Whenever any two individuals encountered, who were friends or acquaintance, they directly embraced, with a mutual exclamation of 'Prosit Neue Jahr!' Bald, pursy old gentlemen trotted about crony-hunting—and sentimentally falling on each other's waistcoats, hugged, bussed, and renewed their eternal friendships for twelve months to come. Mature dowagers bustled through the moving maze on the same affectionate errands; whilst their blooming marriageable daughters, seeking out their she-favourites, languished into each other's fair arms, and kissed lips, cheeks, necks, and shoulders,—none the less fondly that young, gay, and gallant officers, and tantalized bachelors, were looking on. I stumbled on my tailor, and he was kissing—I came across my linen-draper, and he was being kissed:—I glanced up at the musicians, and they were kissing in concert! It was a curious and characteristic scene; but remembering that I was neither saluting nor saluted, and not liking to be particular, I soon caught up my hat, and passing the door-keeper, who was kissing the housekeeper, I kissed my own hand to the Coblenz casino, and its New Year's Ball."

And now, Gerard, could I but write scenery as Stanfield paints it, what a rare dioramic sketch you should have of the thick-coming beauties of the abounding river:—the Romantic Rolandseck—the Religious Nonnenwerth—the Picturesque Drachenfels! But "Views on the Rhine" are little better than shadows even in



THE OMNI-BUSS.



engravings, and would fare still worse in the black and white of a letter. Can the best japan fluid give a notion of the shifting lights and shades, the variegated tints of the thronging mountains—of the blooming blue of the Sieben Gebirge? Besides, there is not a river or a village but has been done in pen and ink ten times over by former tourists. Let it be understood then, once for all, that I shall not attempt to turn prospects into prospectuses,

“ And do all the gentlemen’s seats by the way.”

I must say a few words, however, on a peculiarity which seems to have escaped the notice of other travellers: the extraordinary transparency of the atmosphere in the vicinity of the Rhine. The rapidity of the current, always racing in the same direction, probably creates a draught which carries off the mists that are so apt to hang about more sluggish streams—or to float lazily to and fro with the ebb and flow of such tide rivers as the Thames: certain it is that the lovely scenery of the “ arrowy Rhine” is viewed through an extremely pure medium. To one like myself, not particularly lynx-sighted, the effect is as if some fairy euphrasy had conferred a supernatural *clairvoyance* on the organs of vision. Trees and shrubs, on the crests of the hills, seem made out, in the artist phrase, to their very twigs; and the whole landscape appears with the same distinctness of detail as if seen through an opera-glass or spectacles. To mention one remarkable instance: some

miners were at work on the face of a high precipitous mountain near Unkel;—the distance from the steamer was considerable, so that the blows of their sledges and pickaxes were quite unheard; yet there were the little figures, plying their tiny tools, so plainly, so apparently close to the eye, that it was difficult to believe that they were of the common dimensions of the human race. Had those dwarf miners, the Gnomes of German romance, a material as well as a fabulous existence? Of course not: but I could not help thinking that I saw before me the source whence tradition had derived the Lilliputian mine-haunting elfins of the Wisperthal, who constructed the Devil's Ladder.

I was rather disappointed at Bonn, by the first sight of what sounds so poetically, a vineyard. The stunted vines, near at hand, are almost as prosaic as so many well-grown gooseberry bushes—indeed a hop-ground beats a vineyard all to sticks, or more properly all to poles—as a picturesque object: but in some degree the graperies have since redeemed themselves. They serve to clothe the hills with a pleasant verdure; and at a distance give a *granulated* appearance to a blue mountain, which has something artistic about it, like the tint on a rough drawing-paper compared with the sleekness of the same tint on a smooth Bristol card-board. In the autumn, when the leaves change colour, the vines become still more pictorially valuable to the eye, as during the season of their blossoming they are peculiarly grateful to another sense by their rich fragrance. Besides,

there is occasionally something morally interesting in the mode of their culture: for instance, at the Erpeler Ley, where the vines literally grow from baskets, filled with earth, which are carried up and planted in all practicable holes and corners of the barren rock. In other places, the precarious soil, in terrace under terrace, is secured from sliding down the shelving mountain, by dwarf walls of loose stones, which, at a distance, look like petty fortifications. Considering these toilsome expedients, and their vinous product, one may truly exclaim,

“Hic labor, *Hock* opus est!”

As you leave the open country around Bonn the towns and villages become more retired in their habits, the natives creeping like earwigs and cock-roaches into the cracks and crevices of the land, where their habitations are crowded into such narrow gorges and gulleys as to be only visible when you are right abreast of these ravines. You then discover a huddle of houses, with dark high-pitched roofs, pierced with two or three rows of port-holes—such dwellings presenting a very quaint and picturesque but Doubly Hazardous appearance,—whole villages having, seemingly, been built by some speculative timber-merchant, who found his staple was quite a drug in the market. Accordingly every front, back, or gable, is profusely interlaced with beams and rafters, not in conformity with any architectural rules, but stuck in as uprights, cross-pieces, and diagonals, by mere chance or caprice. Imagine this intricate wood-

work, either painted or of sundry natural hues,—that the wall between is white-washed (Hibernicé) with bluish, yellowish, reddish, or verdant tints—pale pinks, lilac, salmon colour, bleu-de-ciel, pea-green, and you may form some idea of the striped and motley aspect of a Rhenish village. A church spire generally rises above the dark-clustered roofs; and a number of little chapels, like religious outposts, are perched on the neighbouring heights.

Amongst the churches, there is a steeple of common occurrence, which, from a particular point of view, reminds one of the roofs in certain pictures that are rather older than the rules of perspective.



A comfortable life the inhabitants of the Rhenish towns and villages must have had under the sway of the Knight-Hawks, whose strongholds invariably frowned

on some adjacent crag! Can you imagine a timid female, with weak nerves, or a mild gentlemanly sort of person, living at all in the Middle Ages? One of these noble robbers, the Count Henry of Sayn, mortally fractured the skull of a young boy by what was only meant for a paternal pat of the head: it is easy to suppose, then, how heavily fell the gauntleted hand, when it was laid on in anger. What atrocious acts of perfidy, barbarity, and debauchery were openly or secretly perpetrated within those dilapidated castles! What fiendish contrivances for executing "wild justice!" The cruel Virgin-Effigy, whose embrace was certain and bloody death! The treacherous Oublette, with its trap, whereon to tread was to step, like Amy Robsart, from Time into Eternity! But the Freebooters are extinct, and their strongholds are now mere crumbling ruins; not the less beautiful for their decay to the painter or to the moralist. It must wholesomely stagger the prejudices of a *laudator temporis acti* to muse on those shattered monuments and their historical associations; nor would the spectacle be less salutary to a certain class of political theorists—as was hinted by my Uncle. "I'll tell you what, Frank, I do wish our physical-force men would hire a steamer and take a trip up the river Rhine; if it was only that they might see and reflect on these tumble-down castles. To my mind every one of them is like a grave-stone, set up at the death and burial of Brute Force."

Verily, these are but sorry Pleasures of Memory to

be illustrated by such enchanting natural scenery as Rolandseck, the Nonnenwerth, and the Drachenfels! Apropos to which last, you will find inclosed a new version of "Der Kampf mit dem Drachen." It may have less romance than the indigenous legends, but, perchance, all the more reality.

Along with these souvenirs of the "good old times," it was our fortune to have a sample of the good new ones. My Uncle had been alluding to some rumoured insubordination amongst the Landwehr, encamped in readiness for the Autumnal Grand Manœuvres at Coblenz—when he was accosted by a stranger, who apologising for the liberty, begged to caution him against touching on such subjects. "It may bring you, Sir," said he, "into serious trouble—and you might be required to produce the parties from whom you had the report." My Uncle of course thanked his informant, but with a wry face, and soon fell into audible soliloquy: "Humph!—I thought it was written, he that hath an ear let him hear—but I suppose even the Scriptures are forbidden in such despotical countries. Well, it's all one to a dying man—or for my part I wouldn't live under such a suspicious government for a week!" I afterwards took occasion to inquire of the stranger if there was really any ground for apprehension, or such a system of espionage as his warning would seem to imply? "Ask Von Raumer," was his answer,—“or rather his book. He will tell you that the Prussian Police has been too busy in what he calls *fly-catching*,

and has even driven patient people—and who so patient as the Germans?—to impatience. He will tell you that the folly of a day, the error of youth, is recorded in voluminous documents, as *character indelibilis*; and that the long list of sins is sent to Presidents and Ambassadors that they may keep a sharp look out after the guilty. Fly-catching may sound like a mild term, Sir, but not when you remember that the greatest of all fly-catchers are Butchers." "And pray, Sir," I asked, "did any instance come under your own observation?" "Yes—the very night of my first visit to Coblenz there was an arrest, and the Blue-bottle, the son of a President, was carried off in a cart, escorted by gend'armes, for Berlin. He has recently been pardoned, but under conditions, and after two long years of suspense—a tolerable punishment in itself, Sir, for a little buzzing!"

Nothing further of interest (scenery excepted) occurred in our progress. Passing ancient Andernach, Hoche's obelisk,—and liberal thriving Neuwied, a standing refutation of all intolerant theories, we at last approached the end of our voyage. The sun was setting behind Ehrenbreitstein, and whilst the massy rock and its fortress slept in solid shade, the opposite city of Coblenz, encircled by its yellow and loop-holed walls, shone out in radiant contrast,

"With glittering spires and pinnacles adorn'd."

The view is magnificent: especially when you command

that "Meeting of the Waters," whence the city derives its name. The junction, indeed, is rather like an ill-assorted marriage, for the two rivers, in spite of their nominal union, seem mutually inclined to keep themselves to themselves. But so it is in life. I could name more than one couple, where, like the Rhine and the Moselle, the lady is rather yellow and the gentleman looks blue.

In a very few minutes the steamer brought up at the little wooden pier just outside of the town-gates: and in as many more we were installed in the Grand Hôtel de Belle Vue. You will smile to learn that our Hypochondriac has conceived such a love at first sight for Coblenz, that, forgetting his "warnings," he talks of spending a month here! Love to Emily from,

Dear Gerard, yours very truly,

FRANK SOMERVILLE.

P. S.—I have found here a letter for me, *poste restante*, that has thrown the head of the family into an unusual tantrum. It seems that, by previous arrangement between the parties, in default of my Uncle's writing from Rotterdam it was to be taken for granted that he was defunct, in which case his old crony and attorney at Canterbury had full instructions how to proceed. The lawyer, not hearing from Rotterdam, has chosen to consider his client as "very dead indeed,"—and thereupon writes to advise me that he has proved the will, &c. &c., in conformity with the last wishes of my late

and respected Uncle. Between ourselves, I suspect it is a plot got up between Bagster and Doctor Truby, by way of physic to a mind diseased; if so, the dose promises to work wholesomely, for our hypochondriac is most unreasonably indignant, and inconsistently amazed, at having his own dying injunctions so very punctually fulfilled!"